Utica Community Schools

From the Superintendent...
Christine M. Johns, Ed.D.

High expectations lead to success

Utica Community Schools is a district defined by high expectations.

Every member of our school community – parents, students, teachers, administrators, staff and residents – recognizes that high standards translate into success for graduates.

High expectations encourage students to dream beyond what they thought was possible. A positive and motivating community has the power to transform how students think and engage.

UCS is well-recognized for educational excellence and giving students transformative opportunities and experiences.

Our vision, mission and strategic direction provide a foundation of excellence that is illustrated in the life stories of our students.

Renee Odrobina is a talented, hardworking student who is graduating this June.

While her academic achievements have opened many career options, the path she wants to take is one of service and positive change. Her dream after graduation is to fight human trafficking.

Renee saw the devastation of trafficking first hand on a recent missionary trip, and she has pledged her life to “fighting for others who can’t fight for themselves.”

To achieve her dream of helping young women, Renee plans to pursue a degree in social work through Wayne State University.

Another one of our inspiring seniors is Georgia Youhanan Continued on page 4

Utica Community Schools proudly recognizes and celebrates the profession of teaching. As a learning community, the district celebrates the many accomplishments of our outstanding educators.

UCS teachers and staff members inspire students to reach their full potential. Our educators challenge their students to own their future and engage them with discipline and creativity. They promote learning environments that are welcoming, innovative and focused on success.

Across the district, stories of excellence are easy to find. Recently, several UCS educators were honored for the daily difference they make in the lives of our students. Here are their stories.

Mrs. Jacqueline Zawierucha
Beacon Tree Media Specialist
UCS Teacher of the Year

Mrs. Zawierucha is a passionate and dedicated educator who cares deeply for students. As a teacher leader, she is committed to every student building a strong foundation in coding and computer science principles.

Mrs. Zawierucha is a Code.org expert facilitator teaching computer science to students as well as teachers. As a well-respected Media Specialist co-chairperson for the district, Mrs. Z is always willing to collaborate with her colleagues to improve teaching and learning.

Mrs. Karen Borbolla
Morgan and Graebner Art Teacher
Michigan Teacher of the Year
Regional Semi-Finalist

Mrs. Borbolla encourages her students to use persistence and dedication to reach their full potential. She fully embraces new strategies and leadership Continued on page 2
Fiscal Accountability Provides Savings to Taxpayers

Utica Community Schools residents have trusted and supported the district to effectively use taxpayers' funds to achieve its educational mission to provide academic excellence, prepare positive digital citizens, promote student innovation and ensure accountability.

The district is pleased to announce they will be saving taxpayers more than $200,000 in interest through a recent refunding of voter-approved bonds. Our Board of Education continues to be committed to managing taxpayer funds reasonably and carefully. This commitment is reflected in the issuance and resale of bond funds through voter-approved funding proposals.

The district recently refunded $4.5 million in previously sold bonds to take advantage of reduced interest rates in the market.

The refunded bonds were originally issued by the district in 2008 and 2009 to support voter-approved facility improvements. The recent refunding of these sales will reduce interest costs by $210,250 over the next two years.

Continued on page 4

Early elementary robotics team qualifies for international tournament

In just its first year, an early elementary Lego Robotics team is now ready to take on the world.

Six Utica Community Schools students will be taking part in the FIRST® World Championship in Detroit in late April.

Tommy Quinn, Micah Sornig, Bradley Maier, Olivia Richter, Kennedy Remsnyder and Naliyah Reeves, of Browning Elementary - who range from first through third grade - will be competing against international students in the FIRST® LEGO League Jr. competition. Their coaches are Amy Quinn and Jen Sornig.

This is the initial year a FIRST® LEGO League Jr. team has been developed in UCS as part of the LEGO League program. For the Lego junior teams, students are challenged to use Lego parts to build a moon base that has a moving piece. Teams must also create a “Show Me” poster that includes core values and resource components.

The students will compete in the FIRST® World Championship later this month.

Educator Excellence

Continued from front page

opportunities that encourage her students to capture life’s beautiful moments through art.

Mrs. Borbolla works to form partnerships with area organizations which allows students to build confidence in their abilities by showcasing their work to audiences throughout the region. She believes in the potential of all students and inspires them as not only their art teacher but also as a coach for multiple academic and Olympiad teams.

Dr. Lisa Grunewald
Henry Ford II Photography Teacher
Inspirng Teacher Award - Scholastic Arts

Dr. Grunewald inspires her students by creating an environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. She empowers students to not just create a piece of artwork, but to establish pieces that are meaningful and unique.

Dr. Grunewald has a life-long love of teaching and appreciation for the impact of art. One only needs to talk with her students or visit her classroom to see the passion of art in action.

Mrs. Darcy Mackenzie
Flickinger Teacher
2019 UCS Elementary Teacher of the Year

Mrs. Mackenzie has a relentless commitment to her students and her school. She ensures that all children in her classroom have opportunities to contribute and be successful.

Her organization, drive, and love for teaching and learning makes her an outstanding educator.

Mr. Christopher Traskal
Eisenhower Music Teacher
2019 UCS High School Teacher of the Year

When you come into Mr. Traskal’s classes, you experience an environment where student musicians reach their full potential and develop a lifelong passion for performance. Mr. Traskal is well respected for his ability to create performance groups that appear in concert halls throughout the region, state and nation.

Mr. Traskal is not just an outstanding educator, he is an integral reason why Utica Community Schools continues to be recognized as one of the nation’s Best Communities for Music Education. Beautiful music is what you hear, but what you see are students inspired to be both creative and disciplined in the musical arts.

Ms. Amy Chapman
Eisenhower and Jeannette
Region M Social Worker of the Year
Michigan Association of School Social Workers

Ms. Chapman is committed to helping students succeed academically and in life. She closely monitors her students’ achievement levels and guides them in practicing life skills.

She has high expectations and works collaboratively with all members of the school community to focus on the needs of students. She is committed to success by identifying appropriate placement and intervention strategies for students.

Mr. Shayne Reckling
Bemis English Teacher
2019 UCS Junior High School Teacher of the Year
2019 Macomb County Junior High School Outstanding Teacher of the Year

At the heart of Mr. Reckling’s work is the belief that each child can achieve academic success. His passion for teaching is evident in the learning environments that he creates and in his engagement with his students.

Mr. Reckling has a passion for equity and excellence. When he works with students, he challenges them to seize the opportunity to succeed, affirms them for the work that they are doing, and encourages them through messages of acceptance.
Points of Pride

Junior High student earns national Scholastic Arts award
A Davis Junior High School student recently earned top national honors through the Scholastic Arts competition.
Ninth-grader Everett Felch earned a Silver Key honor from national judges for his photograph “Two Up, One Down.”
The photograph earned entry into the national awards program after earning the top prize – a Gold Key – at the regional competition.
The national competition received more than 340,000 submissions with only 3,000 pieces of art and writing receiving honors.

Ninth-grader named Student of the Year for organizing state’s top charity effort
A Henry Ford II student has been named “Student of the Year” for leading a team that raised nearly $30,000 for Leukemia research.
Ninth-grader Madyson Howard earned the “Student of the Year” title from the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society for organizing the State of Michigan’s top fundraiser project.
Howard and her team – “The Dreamers” – raised $27,804 over a seven week period.

College Board honors gender representation in Advanced Placement Computer Science
Eisenhower High School was honored among a select group of schools that have improved gender representation in AP Computer Science programs.
Eisenhower earned the 2018 “AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award” from the College Board, which administers the program.
The College Board also commended Davis Junior High School and Jeannette Junior High School for increased gender representation in AP Computer Science through the Utica Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology.
Out of more than 18,000 secondary schools worldwide that offer AP courses, only 685 schools received the diversity award.

Two students qualify for geography bee
Two Utica Community Schools students are among only five in Macomb County selected for the National Geographic GeoBee state competition at Western Michigan University.
Andrew Munya, of Eppler Junior High School, and Ian Randall, of Shelby Junior High School, will test their geographic knowledge with 4th- through 8th-grade students throughout the state.
Students are competing for prizes and a chance to advance to the national competition in the Washington, D.C. area May 28-30 for the Scripps National Bee.

Utica Community Schools once again honored as one of the nation’s top communities for music education
Utica Community Schools has once again been named one of the Best Communities for Music Education in the nation.
UCS has been honored for its overall support and commitment to music education by the California-based National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM).
“This award reflects the high standards and expectations that are the foundation for Utica Community Schools,” Dr. Christine Johns said. “We congratulate our music education staff and students for this continued recognition and honor their commitment and accomplishments.”
The NAMM Foundation this year honored 623 school districts across the United States.
The Best Communities for Music Education designation is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement in efforts to provide music access and education to all students.
To qualify for the Best Communities designation, Utica Community Schools provided information about funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, support for the music program, and community music-making programs. Submissions were reviewed by The Music Research Institute at the University of Kansas.
This is the fifth year that Utica Community Schools has earned this award.
The NAMM Foundation is a nonprofit supported in part by the National Association of Music Merchants and its approximately 10,300 members around the world. The NAMM Foundation advances active participation in music-making by supporting scientific research, philanthropic giving and public service programs.
For more information about the award, please visit www.nammfoundation.org.
Fiscal Accountability
Continued from Page 2

The refunding was held in conjunction with the sale of more than $90 million in new bonds to fund projects approved by voters in November 2018. This new bond sale is the first phase of funding that supports improvements for safety and security as well as technology and infrastructure.

As part of the refunding and sale, the district received a financial rating that noted a “positive outlook” from credit agency Standard & Poor’s (S&P) through its efforts to bring expenditures in line with available revenue. The credit rating written by S&P Global Ratings stated, “reflecting the positive outlook, in our opinion, is that the district recently achieved structurally balanced operations…that if continued, are likely to help rebuild reserves and strengthen financial flexibility.”

The credit rating has a direct impact on interest rates placed on repaying bond issues. S&P Global Ratings noted if the district continues to bring costs in line with state revenue over the next two years, the credit rating could improve and provide additional savings for taxpayers in future bond sales.

Notice of Nondiscrimination
In compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act and the Persons with Disabilities Civil Rights Act, it is the policy of Utica Community Schools that no person shall, on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry, sex, age, disability, height, weight, or marital status be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination during any instructional opportunities, programs, services, job placement assistance, employment or in policies governing student conduct and attendance. Any person suspecting a discriminatory practice should contact the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources at Utica Community Schools, 11303 Greendale, Sterling Heights, MI 48312 or call (586) 797-1000.

Love for books grows during March is Reading Month

Superintendent
Continued from front page

Youhanan. She plans to pursue a career in medicine, specifically within the pharmaceutical industry.

Like Renee, Georgia has a variety of college and career options open to her.

From the moment she came to UCS, Georgia noted she was challenged to consider and own the importance of a college education.

Through her experience in the district, Georgia recognizes the time and support she has received from her family and her teachers. Their support continues to inspire her to achieve and prepare for her future.

Georgia wants to honor all she has received by furthering her education and making a difference in the lives of others during her career.

Another graduate who credits our district with setting high expectations is Finny Joy. In UCS, Finny says he has found a second family.

His second family not only provided a welcoming environment, but also set a high bar for him. He is graduating this year with college courses already on his resume, and the tools and confidence that will allow him to become a software engineer.

Next year Finny will move with his family to New York. He has already been accepted to New York University.

Another Class of 2019 member who demonstrates deep character is James Aquisto.

I have come to know James as a member of my Student Advisory Committee. In his quiet way, he has demonstrated tremendous leadership through respect and hard work. James believes in himself and values the relationships he has formed with our staff.

These traits, nurtured in the classrooms of UCS, will serve him well as he pursues a marketing career at Northwood University.

Each of these stories center on young men and women who possess talent, a strong work ethic and an appreciation for their family and the UCS community. Each student has confidence in their future and a mindset that demonstrates persistence and heart.

Finally, let’s not forget that our students are nurtured and transformed by educators in the classroom, on the playing fields, and in the arts. These educators live out a standard of excellence rooted in the mission and vision of our district.

We can be proud not only of the graduates here, but of all the students and staff members in UCS.